

# Malay unity call falls flat

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Those asking Malays to come together have been around for decades during which they beat the unity drum when it suited them.

THEY are big names in the Malay political world and they are urging the Malays and Muslims to come together under one big umbrella.

There they were – the one and only Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and his deputy Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin and PAS deputy president Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man.

Two former prime ministers, one aspiring prime minister and the future president of PAS and yet their call for Malay unity has come across like a balloon running out of air.

“I’m sure I was not the only one letting out a long groan and telling myself, ‘Oh no, not again’. I am not being negative but this seemed to be coming out of nowhere. It all seems a little desperate.

“Sure, there are issues that many out there are unhappy about but I don’t see a singular burning issue galvanising the Malays,” said political risk analyst Datuk Wan Shihab Wan Ismail.

A Kelantan-born professional put it more bluntly: “There has been no traction at all.”

Race dynamics is not new to those in the corridors of power but this Malay unity song and dance is getting a little tiresome.

For a start, those making the call have been around for decades during which they beat the unity drum when it suited them.

The irony is that some of the



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## Analysis

said personalities used to be arch enemies who accused each other of dividing the Malays, labelled each other as “infidels” and “deviants” and even refused to pray in the same surau.

Wan Shihab said the problem with these personalities is that they are tired faces who sound like voices of yesteryears.

The Malay ground is rumbling but not to the point that they feel that the sky is falling.

Dr Mahathir will be 100 next month, Muhyiddin turned 78 last month while Hamzah is 68 in a field surrounded by young political ambitions. As for Tuan Ibrahim, his imminent ascent in PAS is not drawing much excitement.

Dr Mahathir is such a paradox and it is quite tragic that the toxic politics between him and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim continues to impact politics today.

“This latest move is about Perikatan Nasional roping in Mahathir as their mascot but he is a spent bullet. People want to take selfies with him but they don’t

want him back in the driver’s seat,” said Wan Shihab.

The supreme irony is that the last time that Malays felt they were truly under siege was when Dr Mahathir was prime minister for a second time and presided over what was perceived as a government dominated by non-Malays.

The formation of Muafakat Nasional shook the Mahathir 2.0 government to the core when it took to the streets to oppose the ratification of Icerd or the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

“Malay unity has always been a Mahathir playbook. It is still a viable concept but it comes and goes. It becomes louder if the government is perceived as not Malay enough. The market is there although there is no groundswell at this point because Umno is in the government,” said lawyer and political commentator Khaw Veon Szu.

Dr Mahathir’s latest Malay umbrella grouping has closed its doors to Umno but welcomes individual Umno members.

Surely the group knows that Umno wants nothing to do with Dr Mahathir.

Umno has not forgiven Dr Mahathir for bringing down the party, poaching its elected representatives and using the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to go after its top leadership.

And as Umno Youth leader Datuk Dr Muhamad Akmal Saleh pointed out: “These are the same people who tried to deregister Umno when they were in power. We have not forgotten what happened.”

Umno leaders are not impressed that the man who took down a Malay-dominated government is now preaching about Malay unity.

PAS and Umno are the two formidable Malay political forces. One commands the religious high ground, the other is seen as commanding the moderate Malay ground.

Umno is at its most stable since 2018. It has found its centre of gravity amid the ups and down of the unity government.

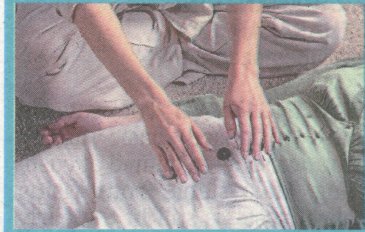
As Johor politician Tan Sri Shahrir Abdul Samad pointed out, Umno ministers are doing better than their fellow Cabinet members from other parties because they are trained and shaped through a grassroots leadership development process.

“Umno has to be part of the equation. Without Umno, there will be no Malay unity,” said a political insider.

It explains how Umno has become quite central to the survival of the Madani government. Umno represents the Malay stake in the government and it is also able to check the advance of PAS.

The Malay voice, said Khaw, is more complicated than ever because of the contrasting forces

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of Islamisation, globalisation and modernisation.

The Mahathir umbrella group has vouched to safeguard the future of the community. Unfortunately, its main component PAS has yet to convince people that it is capable of taking the country forward.

“The goal of this Malay unity group is basically about power and forming the government. Malay parties will do well in the next general election but there has to be new blood.

“But politics does not happen in a void, this is a multi-racial society and they will be unable to get very far without addressing non-Malay interests and concerns,” said the above political insider.

The quest for Malay unity is like the holy grail, much desired but somehow beyond reach.

It is also an old song being sung by yesterday’s singers that is unlikely to fade away. But it might have greater traction if it is sung by younger people who represent the future.

The views expressed here are entirely the writer’s own.